

**This Week In Congress**

*August 2, 2004*

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

**Mourning the Loss of Luke Tiahr**

Last weekend, Congressman Todd Tiahr and his wife Vicki were faced with the tragic and untimely death of their 16-year-old son Luke. As a father, my heart goes out to Todd and Vicki and their surviving children Jessica and John.

Please remember Todd and Vicki Tiahr in your thoughts and prayers. If you would like to send them an email, a special account has been established to handle this information at [Tiahr](#)

[tcondolences@mail.house.gov](mailto:tcondolences@mail.house.gov)

. Personal notes may also be sent to Todd's Wichita office at 155 N. Market, Suite 400, Wichita, KS 67202.

In addition, a memorial has been established in Luke's name to help Kansas teenagers. The memorial is with Intrust Bank and tax-deductible contributions may be sent to the Luke Tiaht Memorial Fund, Intrust Bank c/o Janis Marean, 105 N. Main, Wichita, KS 67202.

During this difficult time, the entire "Big First" family joins the Tiaht's in mourning Luke's loss. May God bless Todd, Vicki, Jessica and John Tiaht during this difficult time and always.

### **Meeting with Arkansas Farmers**

On Monday, I joined Congressman John Boozman (R-AR) in visiting with farmers from northwest Arkansas and southwest Missouri in Bentonville, Arkansas. As the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, I continue to meet with agriculture producers from other parts of the country, in order to gain a better perspective on the issues and challenges they face.

Farmers in Arkansas were concerned about many of the issues facing agriculture today, including BSE testing, Country of Origin Labeling and animal identification. However, there are many poultry producers in the area, and we also discussed what is being done to prevent the spread of Corona Virus, a deadly disease in poultry. I appreciated this opportunity to visit with producers and look forward to continuing to work on behalf of all agriculture in Congress.

### **Visiting Southeast Kansas**

After visiting with Arkansas and Missouri farmers on Monday, I was invited to speak at the annual Producers Co-Op meeting in Girard. Joe Ludlum, the father of a former member of my staff, invited me to speak at the event on Tuesday.

This annual dinner sees over 500 people from the area come out of the fields and into Girard High School for a meal provided by the co-op. I enjoyed the chance to meet with farmers and their families from all over southeast Kansas. During the business meeting, I gave area producers an update on what has been going on in Congress affecting agriculture.

Also on Tuesday, I spoke to the Rotary Club in Pittsburg, at the request of long-time friend and former college classmate, Kevin Mitchelson. In addition, I had the chance to visit the new veterans memorial in Pittsburg, dedicated this past Memorial Day. It is an impressive monument to our state and nation's veterans and a lasting reminder for future generations in southeast Kansas.

### **Meeting Regarding Rural Issues**

On Wednesday, I met with Marci Penner of Inman who is the Executive Director of the Kansas Sampler Foundation. Marci is an effective and tireless advocate for Kansas' rural communities and is currently working on a book highlighting her travels across the state. Starting on her family farm in 1990, Marci has built the Kansas Sampler Festival into an annual traveling event that features Kansas vendors and products and is attended by thousands of people from all over the U.S.

To find out more information about the Kansas Sampler Foundation, I would encourage you to visit their website at [www.kansassampler.org](http://www.kansassampler.org) . As we continue to develop policies and ways to save the way of life we enjoy in rural America, the work of people like Marci will become even more important.

### **Congress Continues Work on Transportation Legislation**

On July 22, the House approved a bill that extends funding for federal highway programs through September 24, and funding for federal transit, highway safety and motor carrier safety programs through September 30. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21), the national highway and transit funding bill, expired on September 30, 2003, but has been extended at current levels of funding as Congress debates a long-term reauthorization.

Over the past several months, the conference committee of House and Senate members has been meeting to work out the differences between the House and Senate versions of the transportation reauthorization bill. They have been trying to settle on a total funding amount that the House, Senate and White House can all agree on, before addressing the details of the legislation. Once Congress reconvenes in September, I look forward to working toward completion of the legislation.

This transportation bill is important to Kansas and will allow us to create and maintain our transportation infrastructure. In addition to providing safer highways, roads and bridges, this legislation also ensures more jobs for Kansans. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I have been involved in the transportation reauthorization since the beginning, and I am eager to see final passage of legislation that meets our needs for the next six years and beyond

### **In the Office**

As we enter August, we had a number of Kansans visit my Washington, D.C. office for Capitol tours. Willis and Eleanor Herbel of Tampa were in, as were Gary and Gladys Voth of Hesston. Harry and Sherry Watts and their children Stuart and Diana of Manhattan were also in the office.

Janel Ruder and her children Heather, Shaunna, Ryan and Luke were in from Hays. Carl and Deann Williams and their children, Megan and Kelly were in from Eskridge, as were Kathy Hildebrand and her sons, Logan and Jordan also of Eskridge.

Bob and Joanne Watson and their children, Jon and Tiffany were in from Salina, as were Margie Lundy of Kansas City and her granddaughter Bridget Lundy of Marion.

Very truly yours,

Jerry